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AUTHORIZATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF  
THE SOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE

CURRENT SERIAL RECORDS

Soil erosion as a menace to the agriculture of the United States received national recognition in 1929 when the Buchanan Amendment to the Agricultural Appropriation Bill for the fiscal year 1930 (Public 769, 70th Cong., Feb. 16, 1929) was adopted by Congress. The amendment provided \$160,000 to be used by the Secretary of Agriculture in conducting soil erosion investigations.

Regional soil erosion experiment stations were set up under the direction of the Bureau of Chemistry and Soils in cooperation with the Bureau of Agricultural Engineering. A part of the funds for this work was assigned to the Forest Service to supplement and carry on research work which had been underway for several years to study the influence of forest cover on runoff. (See Hearings on Agricultural Appropriation Bill for 1931, House of Representatives, 71st Cong., 2d sess., pp. 408-429). Additional appropriations were provided during the next 2 years to enlarge the activities of the erosion and water conservation research stations, 10 of which were established.

Further impetus was given soil erosion studies when in June 1933 Congress passed the National Industrial Recovery Act (Public 67, 73d Cong.) which provided in Section 202 b, for erosion-control work as a means to unemployment relief. Three months later, September 19, 1933, the Soil Erosion Service was established without formal Departmental order as a temporary agency of the Department of the Interior to carry out the provisions of the National Industrial Recovery Act relating to the prevention of soil erosion and to administer expenditure of Public Works Administration allocations for this purpose.

Hugh H. Bennett was appointed Director of the Soil Erosion Service, and in the 18 months of operation under the Department of the Interior an extensive demonstrational program was put into effect throughout the country. Forty-one soil and water conservation demonstration projects were established and about 50 Civilian Conservation Corps camps were assigned to erosion-control work under supervision of the Soil Erosion Service.

Funds, personnel, property, and equipment of the Soil Erosion Service were transferred to the Department of Agriculture (USDA) by an administrative order, signed by the Federal Emergency Administrator of Public Works on March 23, 1935, and approved by the President on March 25, 1935. (This administrative order cited Executive Order 6252, Aug. 19, 1933, and Executive Order 6929, Dec. 26, 1934, as authority for the action.)

On March 27, 1935, the Secretary of Agriculture, by Department Memorandum 665, ordered the consolidation, to become effective April 1, 1935, of all Department of Agriculture erosion-control activities. This order automatically expanded the organization to include the erosion-control experiment stations of the Bureau of Chemistry and Soils and the Bureau of Agricultural Engineering,

the erosion nurseries of the Bureau of Plant Industry, and the Emergency Conservation Work camps previously assigned to the Forest Service for erosion-control work on agricultural land.

In the meantime several Congressional Committees were considering legislation to create a permanent Federal agency for erosion control. As a result, on April 27, 1935, and following passage by both Houses without a dissenting vote, the President approved the Soil Conservation Act of 1935 (Public 46, 74th Cong.). This law specifically established within the Department of Agriculture a "Soil Conservation Service" for the development and prosecution of a longtime program of soil and water conservation. Since the law provided that existing facilities should be used in the formation of the new agency, the Acting Secretary of Agriculture in Memorandum 673, April 27, 1935, ordered that the Soil Erosion Service become the Soil Conservation Service (SCS) with status as a regular bureau of the Department.

Gradual broadening of the program began with the transfer of 150 Civilian Conservation Corps camps from the Forest Service and assignment of more than 300 additional camps to SCS in the summer of 1935 to extend demonstrations to wider areas. In the Omnibus Flood-Control Act of June 1936 (Public 738, 74th Cong.) Congress delegated both the Secretary of War and the Secretary of Agriculture to prosecute a national flood-control program. To carry out USDA's part of this program, the Secretary, in a memorandum to bureau chiefs, dated November 30, 1936, delegated joint responsibility to the Forest Service, the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, and SCS. Subsequently SCS participated in a cooperative program relating to waterflow-retardation measures on upstream farm and range land. Work accomplished before World War II had to do largely with the preliminary and detailed surveys required in advance of actual remedial operations.

During August 1937, the Soil Conservation Service began cooperating actively with soil conservation districts organized by farmers under State laws.\* This action was taken in order to follow through with basic principles for soil conservation work on agricultural land of the United States as laid down in the Report of the Secretary's Committee on Soil Conservation, approved by the Secretary on June 6, 1935. The Committee had recommended, and the

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\* In February 1937 the President submitted to the governors of all States A Standard State Soil Conservation Districts Law, with suggestions that authority be given farmers and ranchers to organize districts specifically for conservation of soil and water resources. Legislatures of 22 States passed such laws that year. The first soil conservation district was chartered August 4, 1937. It was the Brown Creek Soil Conservation District in Anson County, N.C.--the first of its kind in history. By July 1, 1945, all 48 States had enacted soil conservation districts laws and farmers were rapidly organizing districts. Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands passed such laws in 1946, and Hawaii and Alaska in 1947. By January 1963, land owners and operators had organized 2,930 districts including 1,706,980,000 acres and 3,631,995 farms and ranches. The SCS cooperates with districts, furnishing technical assistance in the making of conservation farm plans and applying such plans to the land.

Secretary had approved "that on and after July 1, 1937. . . all erosion-control work on private lands, including new demonstration projects, be undertaken by the Soil Conservation Service only through legally constituted soil conservation associations." From that date, therefore, the work of SCS began to change from a demonstrational character to one designed primarily to lend assistance to farmers and ranchers in soil conservation districts and to co-operate with such districts to the limit of the agency's available resources.

In July 1938, the Secretary of Agriculture directed the Soil Conservation Service to participate with the Bureau of Agricultural Economics and the Farm Security Administration in the water-facilities program as authorized by the Pope-Jones Act of 1937 (Public 399, 75th Cong.). (See Water Facilities Board General Memorandum 2.) The work consisted of helping farmers and ranchers in low-rainfall areas of 17 Western States in building up water supplies through new installations, repair or enlargement of existing facilities, and developing conservation-management plans for the farms and ranches where the work was carried on.

On October 6, 1938, the Secretary of Agriculture announced a realinement of USDA functions and specifically assigned to SCS (1) the land-utilization program authorized by Title III of the Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenant Act (Public 210, 75th Cong.) previously administered by the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, (2) drainage and irrigation investigations formerly conducted by the Bureau of Agricultural Engineering, and (3) certain action phases of the Cooperative Farm Forestry Program authorized by the Norris-Doxey Act of 1937 (Public 95, 75th Cong.). (See Secretary's announcement of Departmental reorganization, dated Oct. 6, 1938, and related memorandums. See also Departmental Memorandum 785 for information on (1) and (3) above.) This served to consolidate in a single agency all soil-erosion, flood-control, and related activities involving actual physical work on farmland, on predominantly agricultural watersheds, and on certain other areas.

On April 19, 1940, Reorganization Plan IV (prepared by the President and transmitted to Congress pursuant to provisions of the Reorganization Act of 1939, approved Apr. 3, 1939) announced, along with other changes in governmental structure, the transfer to the Department of the Interior of functions, moneys, property, and personnel of SCS with respect to soil- and moisture-conservation operations on land under the jurisdiction of the Department of the Interior. This transfer involved work, except research studies, previously carried on by SCS on public land such as Indian reservations in the West.

During World War II, various changes were made in the organization and functions of SCS. In 1942, by Executive Order, SCS was brought into the framework of the War Food Administration and, with other agencies of USDA, concentrated on developing and applying to the land all possible means of increasing production of war-needed crops.

The incentive of production for emergency purposes proved highly significant in the history of SCS. More and more farmers and ranchers requested technical assistance in applying conservation plans to their land. As a result, the Chief of the Soil Conservation Service issued Field Memorandum 1061, dated

May 5, 1942, detailing a major reorganization and establishing basic policies and functions of the agency.

Briefly, SCS adopted a line-staff organization, reduced the number of regional offices from 10 to 7, established small administrative State offices, set up teams of "zone conservationists" to facilitate technical liaison between the regional and field offices, eliminated several technical divisions and positions, and established and renamed others.

During this period the Soil Conservation Service's soils inspection and correlation work was transferred to the Bureau of Plant Industry, Soils, and Agricultural Engineering, by Secretary's Memorandum 1020, dated June 23, 1942. Also, effective July 1, 1942, as specified in Secretary's Memorandum 969 of January 12, 1942, work of SCS under the Water Facilities Act of 1937 was transferred to the Farm Security Administration. SCS activities under the Farm Forestry Act were expanded to include the Prairie States Forestry Project by authorization of the Secretary's Memorandum of June 30, 1942.

SCS established a Water Conservation Division June 30, 1944. This was done in accordance with General Departmental Circular 39, issued May 2, 1944. As stated, the purpose was "to provide facilities for appropriate consideration of proposed activities and operations, together with related research, in water conservation, utilization, and disposal fields and to make these facilities available to other agencies of the Department which have responsibilities for action activities in these fields."

Administrator's Memorandum 27, Revision 1, Amendment 6, March 30, 1945, transferred to SCS all functions of the Farm Security Administration relating to the water conservation and utilization programs of the War Food Administration in the Great Plains and arid and semiarid areas of the United States. These programs were authorized by the Case-Wheeler Act of August 11, 1939, as amended, and the item entitled "Water Conservation and Utility Projects" in the Interior Department Appropriation Act, 1940, as supplemented and continued available by subsequent legislation. The transfer was effective July 1, 1945.

Functions authorized by the Cooperative Farm Forestry Act of May 18, 1937, and administered by SCS, were transferred to the Forest Service, together with the property purchased from the Norris-Doxey funds primarily concerned with the functions transferred. This transfer, in accordance with General Departmental Circular 67, dated June 20, 1945, became effective July 1, 1945.

The Soil Conservation Service, however, on recommendation by the Budget Bureau on July 1, 1942, and by mutual agreement within USDA, accepted the responsibility for completing liquidation of the Prairie States Forestry Project and carrying on windbreak plantings as a part of the integrated program of SCS in cooperation with soil conservation districts.

When the War Food Administration was terminated by the President's Executive Order 9577, June 29, 1945, SCS continued its functions as an independent agency directly responsible to the Secretary.

Flood-control work, which had been suspended for the duration of World War II as of July 1, 1943, was resumed by SCS in 1945. Under the Flood Control Act of 1944 (Public Law 534, Dec. 22, 1944, 78th Cong., 2d sess.) SCS was authorized to apply special treatment for flood control on 11 watersheds embracing nearly 16 million acres of farmland in 12 States. The operations on all of the 11 watersheds are carried on in cooperation with soil conservation districts and other local and State organizations. SCS also resumed flood-control surveys and investigations on additional watersheds, in cooperation with the Forest Service, to determine whether flood-control measures would produce benefits in excess of costs and to develop a remedial program for each area.

The Department of Agriculture Appropriation Act for fiscal year 1950 (Public Law 146, 81st Cong., June 29, 1949) provided for the first time that 5 percent of the allocation for the Agricultural Conservation Program in any county could be allotted to the Soil Conservation Service. This provides reimbursement for time of SCS technicians who help plan and supervise installation of structures or permanent-type practices that qualify for cost sharing under the Agricultural Conservation Program. This action originated in the House Subcommittee on Appropriations for the Department of Agriculture.

During the post-war years SCS, cooperating with soil conservation districts, developed new conservation farm planning procedures to speed up technical assistance to farmers and ranchers. The new procedure, known as "progressive planning," enabled farmers to start gradually and move progressively into well-rounded conservation programs on their farms. The progressive planning method was adopted officially by SCS and the districts on April 9, 1951.

On February 16, 1951, the Secretary of Agriculture, in his Memorandum 1278, directed closer coordination of the functions and activities of the Soil Conservation Service, the Agricultural Conservation Program of the Production and Marketing Administration, and the conservation programs of the Forest Service under supervision of the Assistant Secretary of Agriculture. The policy of this unified program was stated as follows: "The basic physical objective of soil conservation activities by the Department agencies shall be the use of each acre of agricultural land within its capabilities and the treatment of each acre of agricultural land in accordance with its needs for protection and improvement." As a part of the closer unification of the "agricultural resources conservation services" SCS was made responsible for all technical phases of the permanent types of soil conservation work undertaken by the Production and Marketing Administration, in addition to former responsibilities.

On October 14, 1952, the Secretary issued Memorandum 1318, placing responsibility for all soil-survey activities of the Department in SCS. The soil-survey work and staff of the Agricultural Research Administration and the conservation surveys of SCS were thus consolidated within SCS. This work included mapping, classification, correlation, interpretation, direct laboratory services, map compilation, and publication. At the same time, the research activities of SCS with regard to soil and crop management and to water

management on farms related to crop production were transferred to the Agricultural Research Administration. Both lines of work are carried on cooperatively with State agricultural experiment stations.

In Memorandum 1325, dated April 1, 1953, the Secretary assigned responsibility for administration of all of USDA's flood-control and river-basin investigation activities to SCS. Under this assignment SCS develops standards and procedures for the Department's flood-prevention work and plans and schedules watershed surveys and installation of flood-prevention measures.

The Department of Agriculture Appropriation Act for fiscal year 1954 (Public Law 156, 83d Cong., July 28, 1953) set forth a plan for gradual discontinuance of the Soil Conservation Service's plant nurseries. Under the plan, SCS was authorized to continue the most essential work of the nurseries while making arrangements to turn it over to States, soil conservation districts, or other local organizations.

In July 1953, as part of the Agricultural Appropriations Act for 1954, Congress appropriated funds to start demonstrations of combined soil conservation and flood-control work in 50 or more small watersheds. SCS was assigned the responsibility for approving the areas to serve as pilot watersheds in a co-operative program and for helping local groups with technical phases of the work. SCS immediately started watershed-protection planning and operations in 60 small watersheds in 34 States. The work was designed to demonstrate the practicability of complete watershed protection as a means of conserving soil and water; of alleviating damages from floods, silting of reservoirs, and impairment of stream channels; and of solving other upstream land and water problems.

On November 2, 1953, the Secretary of Agriculture issued a Departmental reorganization order (Memorandum 1320, Supp. 4) which grouped the agencies of the Department into four main groups. The Soil Conservation Service was included in the group called Federal-States Relations, together with the Agricultural Research Service, Forest Service, Federal Extension Service, Agricultural Conservation Program Service, and the Farmers Cooperative Service.

The reorganization order abolished regional offices of SCS and gave greater responsibility for program formulation and execution to SCS State offices. Under the new alignment the Soil Conservation Service's head was designated as "Administrator." The overall program is administered by the Administrator and his staff from Washington, D.C. The next operating level is in 50 State and Territorial headquarters whose staffs perform technical and administrative functions to provide service to field personnel in Area and Work Unit offices. Each of the 325 Area offices supervises several of the 3,028 Work Units where conservationists work directly with farmers and ranchers in giving technical assistance. Subject-matter specialists (engineering and watershed planning specialists, plant technologists, and cartographers), each serving a group of States, are located strategically throughout the United States to provide scientific and technical guidance and training and to produce soil maps, farm plans, and other essential working materials.

On January 1, 1954, the Secretary of Agriculture transferred the land-utilization program (Title III, Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenant Act) from the Soil Conservation Service to the Forest Service.

The Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act (Public Law 566) was passed by Congress and signed by the President August 4, 1954. The Act authorizes a permanent program by which USDA provides technical and financial assistance to local watershed groups willing to assume responsibility for initiating, carrying out, and sharing the costs of upstream watershed conservation and flood control. SCS was designated as the USDA action agency, with primary responsibility for USDA's cooperation with local organizations in small watersheds throughout the Nation. The Act terminates USDA activities under the Omnibus Flood Control Act of 1936, but retains authorities provided by the Flood Control Act of 1944 for completion of work on the 11 authorized watersheds and certain emergency activities. It provides new authority for continuing river basin investigations.

An amendment to the Water Facilities Act of 1937 (Public Law 597, 83d Cong.) was passed August 17, 1954. The amendment extended the water-facilities loan program of the Farmers Home Administration (formerly limited to the 17 Western States) to the entire Nation. In addition, the amendment authorized the Farmers Home Administration to conduct a program of direct or insured loans for the purpose of applying soil and water conservation practices to agricultural land. SCS cooperates in the use of these authorities. Upon request of the Farmers Home Administration, SCS reviews the technical phases of loan applications, assists in preparation of conservation plans and designs, and supervises installation of approved practices and measures.

A National Inventory of Soil and Water Conservation Needs was established by the Secretary of Agriculture in Secretary's Memorandum 1396, dated April 17, 1956. The inventory was made for each county in the United States. It provides basic facts about the amount and kinds of soil, water, and plant resources as well as a realistic estimate of conservation treatments needed to safeguard and improve those resources. SCS was assigned responsibility for leadership of the inventory. Other agencies of USDA and State and local agencies contribute data and information on land and water-supply conditions and needs for conservation treatment and planning. The inventory was completed in 1961 and data published in 1962. Further surveys will keep the inventory up to date.

An amendment (Public Law 1018) liberalizing the provisions of the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act (Public Law 566) was passed by the 84th Congress and signed by the President August 7, 1956. Under the amendment, Federal assistance was provided for watershed projects that include municipal and industrial water-supply development, as well as those involving upstream flood prevention, irrigation, and other phases of agricultural-water management. The amendment also increased the maximum size of dams and reservoirs for upstream protection and permitted retroactive application of the new provisions to watershed projects already underway.

New legislation (Public Law 1021), in the form of an amendment to the Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act and the Agricultural Adjustment Act of 1938, authorizing a Great Plains conservation program, was passed by the 84th Congress and signed by the President August 7, 1956. Under this amendment, the Department of Agriculture was authorized to give long-term technical and financial help to Great Plains farmers and ranchers. The act provides for technical assistance in preparing and carrying out a conservation plan of operations plus cost-sharing assistance, under the terms of contracts that may run up to 10 years, in establishing conservation practices. Under leadership of SCS, the program is designed to coordinate USDA programs of technical assistance, cost sharing, credit, insurance, research, and educational aid. The program was designed to give Great Plains land users adequate time for making needed land use changes, and for applying suitable conservation practices on land subject to drought, soil blowing, or water erosion caused by sudden torrential rains.

The Soil Bank Act, passed by the 84th Congress May 28, 1956, as Title I of the Agriculture Act of 1956 and amended November 8 of the same year, set forth a long-term conservation reserve program offering farmers and ranchers income protection while they make needed adjustments in land use. This assistance is designed to stabilize and protect soil and water resources and to help reduce production of crops that are in surplus. Responsibilities of SCS in the program include: Technical assistance relating to conservation plantings, wildlife food and cover, and water-storage facilities; land-capability and soil-survey data and information where needed; and guidance to farmers and ranchers intending to make land use changes under the program.

Amendment to Public Law 566, the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act, by Public Law 85-624, August 12, 1958, assured appropriate recognition of fish and wildlife resources in the planning of watershed projects by SCS. Another amendment the same year by Public Law 85-865 authorized Federal Government cost sharing for fish and wildlife development in connection with watershed projects.

Public Law 86-468, enacted May 13, 1960, amended the Watershed Act (Public Law 566) to make its provisions applicable to the 11 major watersheds authorized by the Flood Control Act of 1944. The amendment made it easier for SCS or other USDA agencies concerned to assist local organizations with technical help, cost sharing, and credit. Public Law 86-545, approved by Congress the same year, amended the Watershed Act to liberalize conditions under which local organizations can meet their commitments for land easements and rights-of-way for watershed protection programs.

Public Law 86-793, approved September 14, 1960, amended the Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act to preserve the historic base for acreage allotments on cultivated cropland shifted to grass or other permanent vegetation under the Great Plains conservation program. It extended existing acreage allotments on such land for an additional period beyond the termination of the GPCP contract equal to the period of the contract.

Public Law 87-128 (Title IV), approved August 8, 1961, further amended the Soil Conservation and Domestic Allotment Act, making December 31, 1971, the

final date for entering into contracts under the Great Plains conservation program rather than the final date such contracts can remain in effect.

Public Law 87-170, passed August 30, 1961, amended the Watershed Act to increase the types of local organizations that may qualify for assistance in planning and carrying out watershed conservation projects.

In July 1962, the Secretary of Agriculture realigned certain agencies to form the Rural Development and Conservation Group. (Secretary's Memorandum 1507, July 10, 1962.) This unit includes the Soil Conservation Service, Farmers Home Administration, Rural Electrification Administration, Office of Rural Areas Development, Farmers Cooperative Service, and Forest Service. An Assistant Secretary for Rural Development and Conservation heads the group--the first time in USDA history that an Assistant Secretary's functional title has included the word conservation.

The Food and Agriculture Act of September 27, 1962 (Public Law 87-703) amended the Watershed Act in several ways, making it more useful to communities throughout the country. New public recreation developments in watershed projects became eligible for Federal cost sharing, including sharing on land easements or rights-of-way and minimum basic recreation facilities. The act authorized "advance" of funds to acquire critical sites for future water impoundments or control structures, with repayment with interest before construction. Funds also may be advanced, up to 30 percent of the cost of a multiple-purpose reservoir, to provide municipal and industrial waters for future use. In such cases, local organizations may defer repayment and interest for up to 10 years.

Section 102 of the Food and Agriculture Act of 1962 made changes in the Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenant Act. Under these new authorities locally sponsored "resource conservation and development projects" may be established to conduct programs of land conservation and land use in areas where acceleration of present conservation activities plus the use of new authorities will provide additional economic opportunities to the people. The Secretary of Agriculture assigned leadership of these projects to SCS.

A "cropland conversion program" was established under authorizations in Section 101 of the Food and Agriculture Act of 1962. It involves long-term land use adjustment programs. The act authorizes agreements up to 10 years with individual landowners for conversion of unneeded or unsuitable cropland to uses such as growing trees or grass or to income-producing recreation. Secretary of Agriculture's Memorandum 1518, November 2, 1962, outlined responsibilities of various agencies and policies for the program. Contracts are based on soil conservation district conservation plans developed in cooperation with SCS. SCS and the Forest Service were assigned responsibility for the technical phases of the program. The Agricultural Stabilization and Conservation Service is responsible for administration of the program and cost sharing.

Under authorities in the Food and Agriculture Act of 1962, USDA established a "rural renewal program" to help relieve underemployment, strengthen family farming, develop natural resources, and otherwise improve the rural economy of an area. Rural-renewal projects must be initiated by local people. The

Farmers Home Administration is responsible for USDA leadership. SCS has technical responsibility for resource-conservation activities in the area.

The Secretary of Agriculture's Memorandum 1516, November 2, 1962, assigned leadership responsibilities, as well as liaison with other agencies and groups, to SCS in activities relating to income-producing recreation.



